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Article by Madeleine Hyland (published in the Shakespeare Globe Centre NZ Newsletter)

I've just come the end of 2 months working on Shakespeare's final play with eleven incredible actors. It was a challenging, elating, painful, wonderful and rich time full of discoveries. But I think the main reward and lesson was seeing how mirroring the conditions that Shakespeare wrote for can have the effect of transforming an audience of punters and a bunch of actors into an actual community by the end of every performance.

We performed it in the round (but also around and above the audience) in an old wooden sea scout hall on stilts on the very edge of Cox's Bay in Auckland. Working in the round, ever since visiting the Globe as part of the SGCNZ Youth Co in 2001, has become my default. I always have to hear a very strong argument against it before budging. I think it is one of the crucial factors that allowed Shakespeare to write what he did, 38 plays of such poetic and magical and enduring magnitude, detail and range. I think the fact that the Renaissance was bringing all the many Greek and Roman gods to the forefront of the national psyche was a factor in this. One develops a much more complex multi-faceted relationship between the self and the Divine I think, when there is a god of doorways and a god of the water and a goddess of love and another of the hearth-fire and another of the wind etc (which of course is very familiar to us in Aotearoa/NZ also). As soon as one is working in the round there is no where to hide, there's just the words, each other, and courage. And a freedom in knowing that every single audience member is getting a slightly different version of you/the character/the play.

There was the sense of working in a very natural environment which also reminded me of the Globe, where one feels like one is inside a giant tree. The tide had a daily conversation with us and the play (not to mention seagulls and the odd rat). The trees, the mud and the water were all challenges that were totally out of our control and this surrender made us listen harder and it also revealed unexpected things about the play - one night the tide was so high it made the ladder tied to the side of the building sound a low chord every few seconds, like the heartbeat of Sycorax or some other strange spirit trapped inside another cloven pine.

Lighting was all one state too, excepting the masque which emerged as a shadow-puppet play. This was partly necessity but ended up being very rewarding as the sharing that then can take place in that same lit space where everyone's imagination has to work strikes, I reckon, into the very essence of theatre. Sound effects and music likewise was also made by the rest of the cast, listening in for cues.

It all sounds very simple writing it up like this. But sometimes that can be the hardest thing, really trusting the bare essentials, trusting the words that Shakespeare has given you to work their magic even when you don't understand every level of meaning right away - trusting in each other as actors, and in the audience to go with you and just experience the story, the time spent together believing in the possibility of transformation. I truly believe that this is how communities are created and strengthened.

It was incredibly special to have Dawn Sanders fly up for our second to last show. At least half the company have been involved in the Sheliah Winn Shakespeare Festival and it was so heartening to realise that it's not something that stops at high school, that it goes on to keep creating a community of inspired theatre and Shakespeare practitioners all over NZ. One day I hope we can take a professional production over to the Globe, so that we can share the discoveries that we are making at this end of the planet with them, although I think the next step is to get *The Tempest* around NZ first. A huge thank you to Dawn for all your ongoing passion in your work!